

2. Unashamed and on Guard

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[0 : 00] Well now we come to our reading from the Bible. The book of books. The book for us to listen to.

And as we listen to it, we hear the voice of the Lord himself. Let's turn then to the second letter of Paul to Timothy. And you'll find this on page 995 in our big hardback Bibles.

Page 995. And I'll read the whole of 2 Timothy, chapter 1. Now this, as I said last week, is Paul's last letter.

Written probably in the year 64 AD to Timothy. Just before Paul was executed by Roman justice. And he's very concerned, of course, to hand on the baton of leadership and preaching and so on to Timothy.

And this letter is full of charges, commands to Timothy for his future work. So 2 Timothy, chapter 1. Paul. Paul.

[1 : 01] Paul. An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. According to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy. My beloved child.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve as did my ancestors with a clear conscience.

As I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears. I long to see you. I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. I'm reminded of your sincere faith.

A faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. And now, I'm sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner.

[2 : 11] But share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Who saved us and called us to a holy calling. Not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace.

Which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. Who abolished death.

And brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher. Which is why I suffer as I do. But I'm not ashamed.

For I know whom I have believed. And I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me.

In the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Guard the good deposit entrusted to you. You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me.

[3 : 19] Among whom are Phygelus and Homogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus. For he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

But when he arrived in Rome. He searched for me earnestly and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

For this is the word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing by his grace to us this evening. Amen.

Well let's turn to this passage again. 2 Timothy chapter 1.

On page 995. And the passage that I'd like us to focus on this evening is verses 8 to 14.

8 to 14. Now if you were here last week you'll remember that we ended up by looking at verses 6 and 7. Which I used as the basis for a prayer a moment ago.

[4 : 23] And in verses 6 and 7 we saw last week that it's at this point that the Apostle Paul begins to stiffen Timothy's spine. For the demanding work which lies in front of him.

So in verse 6 Paul says to him fan into flame the gift of God which is in you. Apply the bellows to the embers. Stir up the fire. And then in verse 7 he reminds Timothy that the spirit of God within him is

not some shrinking violet.

Not a spirit of timidity. But a spirit of power and love and self-discipline. So there in verses 6 and 7 Paul is giving Timothy some strong encouragements to stir himself up.

And to brace himself for the work of being a Christian leader and teacher. And you'll see then that verse 8 begins with a big therefore. Which shows that Paul is now going to develop his theme further.

And draw out the implications of Timothy fanning God's gift into flame. And exercising God's power and love and self-control. Now before we get into the woodwork of verses 8 to 14.

[5 : 31] Can I ask you just to look at the whole paragraph with me. And notice the way that Paul has shaped his thinking. Really how this paragraph is shaped. Because I think this will help us to understand him more clearly.

And see where he's going. There are four commands in this paragraph. There are many commands in 2 Timothy. But there are four in this paragraph. Two at the beginning.

And two towards the end. The two at the beginning both come in verse 8. Do not be ashamed.

That's the first. And secondly share in suffering for the gospel.

Then the other two commands you'll see come towards the end. First of all in verse 13. Follow the pattern of sound words. And then lastly in verse 14. Guard the good deposit.

So we have two pairs of commands. And what comes in between these two pairs of commands?

Well first we have verses 9 and 10. And you'll see that they are a short and tightly packed summary of the gospel.

[6 : 33] This is the gospel of which Timothy is not to be ashamed. Command 1. For which he needs to be willing to suffer. Command 2. Which is the pattern of sound words to be followed.

That's command 3. And is the good deposit to be guarded. Command 4. But we also have verses 11 and 12. And you'll see that they are autobiographical.

And in those two verses Paul tells Timothy first why he suffers as he does. And second how it is and why it is that he Paul is not ashamed.

So I think the paragraph works like this. The thrust of the whole paragraph is generated by those four commands. But verses 9 and 10 will help Timothy.

Because they remind him of how wonderful this gospel is. And therefore why it is worth suffering for. And not being ashamed of. And why it's worth following and guarding. And then verses 11 and 12 will give Timothy further incentives to obey the four commands.

[7 : 35] Because they remind him how his beloved teacher Paul has for years been doing the very things that he is now asking Timothy to do. Namely to be prepared to suffer for the gospel and to be unashamed of it.

Now what I want to do this evening is for us to look at these four commands. But also to look at Paul's summary of the gospel in verses 9 and 10. Because it's as we see just how wonderful this gospel is.

That we then find the adrenaline begins to rise in our systems. And gives us the courage to obey the four commands. Which of course are addressed to us indirectly.

The Lord did not put them here into the Bible simply for the eyes of Timothy. They're here to help us as well. Well let's take the two commands of verse 8 first. And I want us to take them together.

Because they're really very closely linked. Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

That phrase, the testimony about our Lord, simply means the gospel.

[8 : 38] The testimony about our Lord means the true things that Christian people believe and say out loud about the Lord Jesus. Now friends, isn't there something about that first command?

Do not be ashamed. Which is shocking and amazing and astonishing. I mean, why should any person be ashamed of the most joyful, liberating, glorious, life-changing, happiness-creating message in the world?

A message which, to peek ahead for a moment into verse 10, announces the abolition of death. You would have thought, wouldn't you, that a message announcing the abolition of death was something to rejoice in.

Not something to be ashamed about. And yet Paul is making a very serious point. And it's a point that he understood deeply. It's something which he often thought about.

Do you remember how at the very beginning of his letter to the Romans, Romans? In chapter 1, verse 16, Paul says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel. He says here, 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse

12, But I am not ashamed.

[9 : 48] And look on to verse 16, where he commends his friend Onesiphorus for not being ashamed of Paul's chains. The apostle Peter understood and taught just the same thing.

He writes in 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 16, If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed. Or think of Jesus' words in Mark chapter 8, verse, I think it's verse 38.

Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in his glory.

So why should any person be tempted to feel shame about the good news about Jesus? You can understand somebody being ashamed of something shameful.

So, for example, if you're caught fiddling your income tax by the Inland Revenue, and you're exposed, that would be something to be ashamed about. Or if you were caught nicking a tie and a pair of socks in Marks and Spencers, and then your photograph the very next morning were to be splashed all over the front page of the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Gazette, you would rightly feel ashamed, and you would deserve to.

[11 : 03] But why should anyone be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? The answer is, because the world's opinion, the opinion of the non-Christian world, is against the gospel, by and large, and all of us naturally feel more comfortable swimming with the stream than swimming against the stream.

Now, let me suggest a couple of scenarios. Imagine you're a Christian girl at school, maybe aged about 15. And one day at school, a very cynical and anti-Christian classmate of yours happens to see a Bible poking out of your school bag.

And she says to you, Jessica, why have you got that Bible in your bag? No reply. Do you read it? Do you believe it? Yes. What did you say? Yes. Now, that's almost inaudible yes, is the yes of someone who's ashamed.

Think of a much older person. Think now of a Christian man aged, let's say, about 70, a retired man who's enjoying his golf and is a member of his club.

[12 : 20] And one evening, perhaps the month of May, it's just been a nice Saturday, and there's been the club competition, and there's a special dinner. And this man is sitting with his friends, enjoying his special celebration dinner.

And he gets talking to another club member that he knows a little bit, but hasn't seen much of for many years. And after they've discussed the weather and the prospects for the Scottish Open, this other man says to him, Sidney, I seem to remember that you're a churchman.

Yes, John, I am. Do you still go to that rather fundamentalist church of yours where they take the Bible so seriously that they really do believe that Jonah was swallowed by a basking shark?

Yes, I do, John. But Sidney, this is the 21st century. I mean, haven't we grown up? Haven't we, in this wonderful world of science and technology, reached a point where we can leave behind all this medievalism?

Hasn't that brilliant, wonderful Professor Dawkins of Oxford University finally kicked all this mumbo-jumbo into touch? How does Sidney reply?

[13 : 24] Is he at all prepared for that kind of onslaught? Either he's shame-faced and does nothing and says nothing and turns back to his strawberry gatto.

Or the adrenaline begins to rise in him and he defends the gospel. Now, he may not be the cleverest or most articulate of men, but he can still be unashamed of the gospel.

So, for example, he might say something like this, I've been reading the Bible for many years, John, and I've come to believe that it's profoundly true at every level. Or he might say this, Jesus Christ has transformed my life and has rescued me from the desperate plight that we're all naturally in.

That wouldn't be a bad thing to say because if you talk about a desperate plight, that might make the other man say, what kind of a desperate plight do you think I'm in? That'd be a useful evangelistic opening, wouldn't it? Anyway, the temptation to be ashamed or to feel ashamed of the gospel comes to us because we don't want to feel the sharp edge of other people's tongues.

We don't like it when people speak about us with contempt. We like to be praised, but we don't like to be criticized. Now, to look again at our verse 8 here. This is where not being ashamed is so closely linked with being prepared to suffer for the gospel.

[14 : 45] Anyone who is not ashamed of the gospel will be prepared to speak up for Jesus and the truth about him. And that's what will lead him sometimes to suffer people's hostility and ridicule.

Now, for Timothy and Paul, in the Roman Empire in the first century AD, the cost of being an unashamed Christian was far higher than it is for us because it could well mean prison, physical violence, torture, disgrace, even execution.

This, of course, is still the situation in so many countries in the world today. In the Middle East, for example, various countries in the Far East and parts of Africa. Where the gospel is opposed and hated and marginalized, those who are unashamed of it will be opposed and hated and marginalized.

So the link between being unashamed of the gospel and suffering for the gospel is very clear. If we stick to the gospel boldly and unashamedly, we will suffer for it sooner or later.

And if we want to avoid the suffering, all we need do is become ashamed of the gospel by toning it down or by ditching it altogether or perhaps rewriting it so that it can fit more comfortably with the spirit of the age.

[16:03] So, for example, we could cut out its insistence that it's only through Jesus that it's possible to be reconciled to God. We could say, as so many people like to say today, and you'll hear this on Radio 4 almost every day, that Christianity is just one of many valid approaches to the questions of God.

Now, if you speak like that, you'll be praised loudly. Or possibly, you might be ashamed of the ethical aspects of the gospel. The most prominent contemporary example of being ashamed of gospel ethics is the way in which so many people today are wanting to rewrite and redefine marriage and move the Bible's ethical goalposts concerning marriage.

Our political leaders are falling over each other to do this today, aren't they? One after the other. Even the American president a week or two ago has done the same thing. But to redefine marriage is an example of people being ashamed of the Bible's teaching and therefore of Jesus.

It's a way of saying the teaching of Jesus is no longer fit for modern people. Now, let's notice something else here in verse 8. Paul says to Timothy, don't be ashamed of the gospel.

But immediately afterwards, he adds, and don't be ashamed of me. his prisoner. There are some people who say that they're very happy with Jesus, but they want to keep at arm's length from Paul.

[17:34] But the teaching of Paul is the teaching of Jesus developed and applied. Paul, after all, is Jesus' emissary, his apostle, the one commissioned by Jesus to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

So Paul speaks with all his master's authority. We can't separate Paul from Jesus by so much as a hair's breadth. And experience shows that people who depart from Paul and become ashamed of him and his teaching will quickly depart from Jesus as well.

So, Timothy is to be unashamed of the gospel and unashamed of Paul. And this will inevitably bring suffering to him. So what power, what power will enable Timothy to endure the suffering?

Paul tells him there at the end of verse 8, share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Not by the power of stoicism or grit and determination or the stiff upper lip, but by the power of God.

Now, isn't that remarkable? We generally think of ourselves as needing the power of God to enable us to do great things, to pray or to testify in public or perhaps to organise a CU mission or teach a Sunday school class or even to run a half marathon.

[18:55] But here, Paul shows Timothy that he needs the power of God to enable him to endure the suffering that must come to the Christian who is unashamed of the gospel. Power given to help us to endure suffering.

Would you dare to ask God to give you power for this purpose? Tomorrow morning, Monday morning, why don't you pray, Lord, please give me power and then see what happens over the next few days.

Dangerous thing to pray, isn't it? Now, it's at this point where verse 8 ends and verse 9 begins. It's here that Paul suddenly cracks open what you might call a mini-helping of gospel truth.

Verses 9 and 10 don't give us the whole gospel in all its glorious details. Paul would have needed 20 or 30 pages to do that. But he just gives Timothy a brief sketch of some of the gospel's most important features.

Why? Well, he's just used this phrase, the power of God, to help Timothy to suffer. And he wants to encourage Timothy, who may be gulping a bit at the prospect of suffering.

[20:05] He wants to encourage Timothy by reminding him of other and even greater things that the power of God has achieved. So he sketches out the powerful gospel as if to say, Timothy, if God can do all this by his power, can't you trust him to give you the power to endure suffering?

Of course you can. If God has achieved the gospel, surely he can see you through opposition and persecution. Now, friends, are your seatbelts buckled on?

Let's take notice now in Paul's sketch of the gospel in verses 9 and 10. I want us to notice nine things. Okay? Nine points. Very quick ones. First, God saves, verse 9, who saved us.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. The gospel is for lost, hell-bound wretches. And through it, God saves them. Saved is a most glorious word.

Second, still in verse 9, God called me, God called us, to a holy calling. So he doesn't save us so that we should carry on unchanged.

[21 : 17] He calls us to a life of holiness, sweet, beautiful, wholesome, self-controlled holiness.

Through the gospel, over time, over long periods of time, we are remade and reshaped and increasingly conformed to the image of Jesus.

We're called to holiness. Third, still in verse 9, not because of our works. We can't work our passage to heaven. We are bankrupts who cannot pay.

We're corpses who cannot get up and walk. We are powerless, helpless, hapless, hopeless. We can't work our passage. And what a relief that is. Fourth, still in verse 9, it was not our works that saved us but his own purpose.

So he, God, purposed it all, planned it all, initiated it all from the mists of eternity. To save us was God's purpose. Isn't that good news?

If he purposes to save his people, who can resist him? Fifth, still in verse 9, it was not our works that saved us but his grace.

[22 : 32] Grace is kindness to the unkind. It's mercy to the pathetic, selfish people that we are by nature. God is gracious when he says to one of us, you will be mine, forgiven, cleansed, and rescued for eternity.

Sixth, still in verse 9, he gave us this grace in Christ Jesus. So in giving us Jesus Christ to die for us and to be raised for us, he gave us everything we need.

All of God's tender love has been poured out upon us and channeled to us in his gift of Jesus to us. Jesus is the sole agent, he is the sole distributor of the gospel of grace.

Seventh, end of verse 9 and into verse 10, this is about timing. This gospel of grace was planned and purposed before the ages began, says Paul, before the Iron Age, before the Stone Age, before Jurassic Park was a twinkle in its father's eye, before the Big Bang, but it has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.

It was always there in the mind of God and now it has happened, says Paul. So the timing is both eternal and first century AD.

[23 : 55] Eighth, from verse 10, the gospel announces the abolition of death. Now just think of the man who wrote these words and the situation that he was in when he wrote them.

Here is Paul about to die about to be executed. He knew about Roman justice and he writes over the page, chapter 4, verse 6, the time of my departure has come and this man who is about to face the executioner's sword calmly reminds Timothy that Christ has abolished death.

So what does that phrase mean? Well, clearly, Christ has not eliminated the fact of death because people continue to die. We shall all die unless the Lord Jesus comes first.

What Paul means is that Jesus, by dying and rising, has fundamentally altered the character of death for Christians. For the unbeliever, death is the fearsome enemy that it always was.

But for the Christian, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians, death has lost its sting. It's like a scorpion which has had its sting removed. For the unbeliever, the sting of death is the power of death to send a person not only to the grave but to eternal condemnation.

[25 : 17] But for the believer, although the business of growing old and dying is still unpleasant, death becomes the gateway to the presence of God. Both Jesus and Paul speak of it as falling asleep.

Jesus says in John's Gospel, whoever believes in me even though he dies, yet he shall live. Paul writes, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

When Paul writes in our verse 10 here that Christ has abolished death, what he means is that Christ has broken and nullified the real power of death. And he has done this decisively through his death and resurrection.

His resurrection is the first fruits or guarantee of the resurrection of all who belong to him. Now for the older ones here amongst us, the greyheads, don't we need to know this?

Because we only have a few more years left on earth. But it's equally important for the brownheads, the redheads, the blackheads and the blondies here too. Because I can tell you life whisks along at a very rapid rate.

[26 : 26] You've only got to turn around three times and two decades have passed. But if Christians know as Paul does that Christ has broken the power of death, it fundamentally alters our whole view of what our life is for and what it's about.

Ninth and last, still in verse 10. This is really a glorious development of the last point. Not only has Christ abolished death, but he has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Now in the Old Testament, life and immortality are present, especially in books like the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah. But they're rather dimly perceived.

It's as if we're looking at them in the half darkness. But in the New Testament, the noonday sun shines down upon them. Immortality and life.

Immortality is not something that we possess in ourselves. But Jesus possesses it in himself, as of course, God the Father does too. And Jesus gives it to all who belong to him.

[27 : 32] So that's the ninth point in this little gospel summary. Now as I said before, these two verses are a very condensed summary of the gospel. But surely there is more than enough in those two verses to make Timothy say to himself, this gospel is so wonderful and so breathtakingly good and gracious and generous that I would be prepared to suffer a great deal for it, as Paul has done before me.

And it's so good that if I were ever to be ashamed of it in public, I would deserve to have the word coward branded on my forehead. Now in verse 8, Paul has already encouraged Timothy to be willing to suffer for the gospel.

But in verse 11 and verse 12, Paul becomes rather more specific. In verse 11, he speaks of the appointment, or you might say the post or the job, to which he has been assigned or commissioned. And that is the post of preacher and apostle and teacher of the gospel. And this is the reason, he says in verse 12, for why he suffers as he does.

It's because he will keep on preaching and teaching the gospel. And the gospel humbles human pride. And that's why so many people don't want to listen to it.

[28 : 50] They don't want to be told that they're powerless to save themselves. But Paul keeps on preaching and that's why he suffers. The implication is that if he were to stop preaching and teaching, if he were to be a sensible old fellow and have the presence of mind to retire to a bungalow in East Lothian and plant potatoes, he might avoid persecution and imprisonment.

But he says, it's because I'm sticking to the terms of my appointment. It's because I'm keeping on as a gospeler that I suffer as I do. But then he returns to the theme of not being ashamed.

And what he says in the rest of verse 12 is going to help Timothy and it will help all of us as well not to be ashamed of the gospel. So let's look at his words in verse 12. But I'm not ashamed.

Why not? For I know whom I have believed. That's why I'm not ashamed. I know him. As I preach about Jesus Christ, I'm not preaching about somebody that I'm barely acquainted with.

I know him. I know what he's like. I know who he is. I know what he has achieved. I know his character. I know his utter trustworthiness. I know that he is the truth.

[30 : 05] That he's the light of the world. I know that he's the only way to God the Father. I know that he's the good shepherd who has laid down his life for the sheep. I know that his death has broken the power of death and that his resurrection has opened the door into heaven.

It's because I know the one whom I have believed that I'm not ashamed. I'm sold out to him. I've burned all the bridges back into the old life. Of course I'm not going to be ashamed of him now.

Now friends, isn't this an example for us to follow? It's as we get to know the Lord Jesus better and better that the temptation to be ashamed of him will grow less and less. We don't get to know him really well overnight.

But as the long years go by and as the Bible more and more becomes the book of books to us, we begin to see ever more clearly in the Bible's pages the character, the truthfulness and the trustworthiness of our Lord Jesus.

And the better we come to know him, the less we shall be tempted to be ashamed of him. And there's a particular characteristic of the Lord Jesus whom Paul knows so well that Paul now focuses on as he brings his further commands to Timothy in the final part of the paragraph.

[31 : 23] Look with me again at verse 12. It's because I know him so well that I'm convinced about something. I wouldn't be convinced about this if he were just a casual acquaintance.

But it's because I know him that I'm convinced that he is able to guard to protect and keep safe until the day, the day of his return, the thing that he has entrusted to me, which is the responsibility of preaching the true gospel.

So Paul sees himself as a trustee. Something has been entrusted to him. He is now, because of his imminent execution, he's having to hand on his trusteeship to Timothy.

But he does so in the confidence that the Lord Jesus is able to preserve and protect the true gospel until the world ends. Now you'll see in verse 14 that Paul is about to command Timothy to guard this deposit, this trust.

So it must have put great courage into Timothy's heart to know that the gospel he has to guard is also being guarded by Jesus himself. And the history of the last 20 centuries demonstrates so clearly how the Lord Jesus is guarding the truth of the gospel.

[32 : 42] In every century in the last 20, the true gospel has been threatened again and again by heresies and distortions. Sometimes, as in medieval Britain, it has become almost buried, almost out of sight under layers of ecclesiasticism and superstition and religiosity.

But it gloriously broke through to the surface again. And it keeps on doing so because the Lord Jesus guards this precious deposit.

Verse 12 assures us that the gospel will never be lost while the world continues. So don't let's get too depressed when we see the gospel being threatened and scorned and polluted.

It is being guarded by the one who is stronger than a tiger. And he will see to its preservation. But Timothy and his followers, that includes us, are also to be very much involved in the work of preserving and defending and propagating the true gospel.

And this is where Paul's two final commands to Timothy come in. So first of all, from verse 13, follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 57] That's an interesting phrase there. The gospel consists of a pattern of sound words. So the contents of the gospel have been given to us by God.

The gospel is not something that we invent. It's not something that we can improve on by adding a few clever ideas of our own. Our job is not to embellish it or to alter it so as to make it more acceptable to the modern world.

our job is to follow it, to conform our lives to it, and then to teach it to others. And it's such a relief to us to know that we haven't got to invent it or dream it up for ourselves.

I heard not long ago of a website called www.howtostartyourownreligion.something something.

So all you have to do is to take your mouse and click it appropriately and up on your screen will come all you need to know in order to start your own religion. Isn't that lovely to know that?

[35 : 03] Well, verse 13 here is a more than robust answer to that kind of nonsense. There is a pattern of sound words given to us. The gospel is a package.

It includes various things and it excludes every other idea. It's a pattern of words about God the Father, about Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about God's glorious plan of salvation brought to effect in the person and work of Jesus.

And it is the joyful, lifelong task of every Christian to get to know that pattern of sound words deeply. It's rather like exploring a great tract of country over a lifetime.

And it's getting to know this pattern of sound words that transforms us from being aimless and rudderless souls into people who know their God and are able to help others to know him.

And where does Timothy find this pattern of sound words? Well, Paul tells him in verse 13. It's my teaching, Timothy. It's the sound words that you've heard from me.

[36 : 12] Paul speaks there as a spokesman of Jesus, an apostle. Now, of course, he's not claiming that the gospel is his idea. In fact, he tells us very forcefully in Galatians chapter 1 that the gospel he teaches was not invented by any human being.

It came to him from Jesus himself. And this gospel of Paul's, it is the apostolic gospel. It's the same as the gospel of Peter and John and Matthew and Mark and Luke.

It is one gospel. And it's given to us in a pattern, not invented by us. And how is Timothy to follow this pattern? Paul tells him at the end of verse 13, in a life of faith and love.

That's to be his attitude and his manner of life. And he learns that also from Jesus. So let's rejoice in this pattern of sound words.

It is a lifetime's task, a wonderful lifetime's task to get to know it really well. But it's the making of Christians when we do. Well now let's look at the final command in verse 14.

[37 : 16] Guard the gospel. This command takes Timothy further than the command of verse 13. It's one thing to follow the gospel, but to guard it is going to test his character and his commitment to Christ.

Guarding the gospel will mean that Timothy will not only teach it, but will also be willing to deny and gainsay ideas that contradict it.

So imagine a conversation that Timothy might have with somebody. Somebody says to him, Timothy, surely a loving God will forgive all human beings in the end. Timothy says, no.

He will forgive those who repent and turn to Christ, but not those who refuse to. That is what the gospel teaches. Oh Timothy, surely God will allow me to pray to Jesus Christ and to at least one or two of the rather nicer gods of the Indian subcontinent.

Timothy says, no. He says it graciously and lovingly, but he says it firmly. The guardian of the gospel is prepared to say, no.

[38 : 31] The lips of those who guard the gospel must be ready to say, no. In fact, one of the main duties of a Christian pastor is to say, no.

It is a blessing, friends, to any church to have a pastor who has the courage to say, no. The Christian teacher deals in affirmations and denials.

The Christian teacher is to affirm what the Bible affirms and is to teach also what the Bible denies. The Bible teaches this and the Bible says that this is not true and the Christian teacher must say both of these things.

If you ever go to a church where the minister smiles broadly to everybody and says, yes, yes, yes, to every idea and every suggestion, you know that that minister has abdicated responsibility for guarding the gospel.

Sometimes the greatest expression of love to a person is to say, no, you're wrong and let me show you what the Bible teaches. Now, Timothy, if he quails at the idea of guarding the gospel, he has wonderful help to hand.

[39 : 39] Verse 14, the Holy Spirit who dwells within him will give him power to be an effective guardian and we've already seen in verse 12 that Jesus too is guarding the sacred trust of the gospel.

Well, friends, it's time to clear our throats and have a little cough because we're about to sing, but let's allow Paul, our apostle, to write on our hearts these four great commands that he placed on Timothy's heart.

Don't be ashamed of the gospel. Be willing to suffer for the gospel. Follow the pattern of the sound words of the gospel and guard the gospel.

if those four commands shape and frame our lives, we shall be a blessing to other people. Let's pray together.

Dear God, our Father, have mercy upon us because we're weak individuals and we do sometimes quail at the idea of standing up for Jesus, of guarding the gospel and being unashamed of it in all circumstances and all company.

[41 : 01] But please help us, dear Father, to honor you and our Lord Jesus and to count it much more honorable to please him than to please the world.

Lord, we ask that you will help us more and more to frame our lives according to this teaching so that our lives may be a blessing to others, that others may see us and come to us and find true teaching of the true gospel.

Have mercy upon us and bless us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.